

Overview of Partner Agency Efforts to Clean Up the Lower Passaic River With Focus on Alternatives for the Lower Eight Miles

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An interagency effort is underway to remediate and restore the Lower Passaic River (17-mile tidal portion of the river from Dundee Dam to Newark Bay). Given the complexity of the estuary, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the Superfund Program, is implementing concentric studies of manageable scope, while moving forward expeditiously on key actions.

- The overall study of the Lower Passaic River (17 miles) is being implemented by a group of about 70 potentially responsible parties, under oversight by EPA and its Federal and State Agency partners. While EPA and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection are studying how to address the contamination (including dioxins, metals, polychlorinated biphenyls, etc.), the other partner agencies (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) are studying how to restore the ecosystem to various human and ecological uses.
- During that overall 17-mile study, EPA found that the sediments of the lower eight miles are the major source of contamination to the Lower Passaic River and Newark Bay. EPA and its partners are focusing on whether action can be taken on those highly contaminated sediments while the 17-mile study is on-going.
- Most recently, EPA and Occidental Chemical Corporation signed an agreement to remove the most highly contaminated river sediments adjacent to the former Diamond Alkali plant in Newark.
- As these interrelated studies and actions are proceeding on the Passaic River, EPA is also overseeing another study of contamination in Newark Bay.

While most of the work described above is being implemented by potentially responsible parties under government oversight, EPA and its partner agencies are leading the effort to focus attention on cleaning up the sediments of the lower eight miles of the Passaic River. The goal of the lower eight-mile action is to substantially reduce risks by first addressing the major on-going source of contamination. A Focused Feasibility Study (FFS) evaluates alternatives for clean up, including no action and combinations of dredging and capping. Since a draft FFS was reviewed by stakeholders in 2007, substantial revisions have been made, including additional sampling, a reconfigured navigational channel and modeling of future river recovery scenarios. A Proposed Plan is expected to present a preferred clean-up option for public comment in 2011.